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ABSTRACT

It would be foolish to succumb to the view that the educational problems of America are limited to schools in poor neighborhoods or to students from disadvantaged families. Across the country, whether in suburban affluence or urban poverty, students' commitment to school is at an all-time low. This low level of student commitment is matched by poor performance on standardized tests. This analysis of student engagement in school is based on an extensive program of research conducted over 10 years. During that time, more than 20,000 teenagers from 9 high schools that reflect the diversity of American education were surveyed, and hundreds of their parents and dozens of their teachers were interviewed. Nearly 40% of the students came from ethnic minority families. The study finds that an extremely high proportion of American high school students do not take school, or their studies, seriously. Their time out of school is seldom spent in activities that reinforce what they learn in class. The adolescent peer culture of America demeans academic success and scorns students who try to do well in school. Perhaps the most serious finding is that American parents are just as disengaged in schooling as their children are. Finding the remedy involves looking at students' lives outside of school. An appendix gives an overview of the research design. (Contains 59 references.) (SLD)

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